

Margo

A story by J. B. Kirkpatrick

I felt the wind brush across my collar. I looked around, but I was alone. The little cemetery was not well kept, but there were signs that someone mowed the grass occasionally. There were no grand slabs of granite or marble, just a few broken pieces of concrete, hastily poured and scribbled upon. This was a poor country cemetery, lost on a potholed back road, in the forgotten part of a forgotten county. There were no sounds, just the ringing of silence in my ear.

The wind touched me again as I looked down at the flat sand in front of me. It had been twenty years, but I could still smell her perfume.

Her husband had been a drunkard most of the time I had known him, which was a considerable amount. He and I had been friends long before Margo came into our lives. She was New York stock, born and bread. She was not what I would call aristocracy, but she was well off enough to have an apartment on Fifth Avenue. I'll never forget that address. Number Five, Twenty Five, Fifth Avenue.

And here she was. Cold in the ground, with a lot of sugar sand on top of a plain gray metal coffin. No head stone, only a small stainless steel marker laying half covered in dried, dead, grass. I didn't visit very often, but at least I did visit, from time to time. I once found the little marker half way to the barbed wire fence. I'm surprised that the person mowing the grass didn't hear it when the blade hit the steel marker. I picked it up and put it back in the ground close to where I thought she lay.

It was a bright May day when he walked into the office and announced that he was in love with the most beautiful girl in the world. One thing I quickly learned about a drunkard or habitual drinker, take everything they say with a grain of salt. Add a paper plate, some pepper, and you have a recipe for something that will end up in the trash. or the toilet. But for some reason, this time the cosmic forces intervened.

The first time I saw her, I was in awe. How in Gods name did my friend land this Venus de Milo? She was not the kind of girl to have staples in her belly, like some picture in a magazine; she was the epitome of grace and beauty. She would look at home in the loftiest rooms and halls the world had to offer. I was truly shocked. Shortly there after, they were married.

My friend of fifteen years, had definitely taken a giant step up. From the west Texas boy trying to make it in the big city, he was now at the heights of grandeur and living. Now of course, he could afford the best of scotches. For him, it was a dream come true. Until the news came. Margo was dying.

He took the news better than I would have expected. But after I thought about it, I think he took the news as I should have expected. I could see the dollar signs in his eyes. He was the

great pretender. How sad for Margo not to know what the future would hold. I vowed that I would spend as much time with her as I could. I would share my faith and laughter, and help her through this dark valley.

I am a man of logic and reason, with an abundance of emotion added to the mix. At that time in my life I did not believe in ghosts or ghost stories. I believed that if I could see it, or touch it, it was real. I was wrong.

As it began, Margo and I would sit in the back yard of her home, while my friend was busy inside with some project and a bottle of scotch. We began to talk about religion and the super natural, and the impending death leap that she must soon take. Even then, there was a strong connection that we shared. She would tell me things that she would not dare to share with her husband. She knew he was a drunkard, but she loved him even through the scotch.

She was the last of her family, and the fortune had come to her. She knew that after she was gone, her husband would get what was left. She was ok with this, for she told me so herself.

Day after day I watched as the marble statue flaked and crumbled away, until only skin and bones remained. Much of her fortune had been spent traveling the world, looking for the miracle cure that would save her from that final step. None were found.

She chilled easily, even in the summer sun. But she insisted that we continue our talks in the back yard. I tried to keep things as light as possible, and we frequently laughed at some silly news that I brought from one of my jobs. We would sit out in the back yard in the summer sunshine and drink iced tea. Sometimes we would just sit, not saying a word, and listen to the sound of our hearts beating. I tried to keep her humor up as much as possible, but more and more our conversations turned to life after death. There were questions that neither of us knew the answers to. I thought I had a strong sense of right and wrong, good and evil, and life and death, but soon I began to question my own beliefs.

I told myself, I must be strong for Margo. She needs someone with a clear mind to help her through this. I did my best for her.

One day as I helped Margo across the back yard to her chair in the sunshine, she stopped. I asked if something was wrong. She looked up into my eyes and asked,

““Will you always be there for me?””

“Of course I will.”

“No, I mean even after I die, will you still be *here* for me?”

I thought long and hard about what she was asking of me. It was a commitment that I knew would last a lifetime.

“Yes Margo. I will always be here if you need me.”

“My husband, your friend, means well, but I am not sure that he will be able to do the things that I have asked him to do, after I’m gone. I am counting on you to take care of that. And you know that I’ll be watching you.”

A joke we too often play with, is that someone says or does something that we don’t like, and we say that we are going to come back and ‘haunt’ them. I no longer see any humor in it.

“Yes Margo, I promise I will do what ever you want me to do.”

She accepted my words with some comfort. And we continued to her chair in the sunshine. We sat there without speaking for the rest of the afternoon. Though I didn’t say a word, my mind was a torrent of activity. Questions and hypothesis, queries and conundrums raced to the deepest reaches of my psyche. Is it really possible to watch from the other side? Could they really come back and ‘haunt’ someone if they wanted to? I was getting into an area that I was uncomfortable with.

I grew up in a small country church, and had what I thought were strong, solid beliefs, and moral values. I spent my college years sewing wild oats and drinking barley, but eventually came back to the fold. My feet were on solid ground, or so I thought. Nothing however, prepared me for what was to come.

My good friend, and loyal husband to Margo, had made arrangements for an engraver to carve a special head stone for the final resting place. It was not too big or gaudy, but it had a carved likeness of Margo on the face of it.

It was really quite unique, just like her. It had the date of birth, her full christian name, and a blank spot for the date of her departure. Margo was surprised and very happy when she saw it. I can not imagine what it must have felt like for her. But I stood faithfully by and watched all these things transpire.

She wanted to be buried in a quiet country cemetery and asked if I would find one for her. I did. My friend treated the whole affair like it was another one of his projects. He gathered data, and produced the final specifications for the departure. It began to wear on me, the fact that his actions were similar to those taken for a new project at his office. He was dutiful to the project until the end. At which point, he moved on. He made a big deal out of the fact that she was the love of his life, but actions speak loudly.

Margo died one night, alone in her bed. My friend was in the other room working and drinking fine scotch. The services were at one of the local churches. The morning of the service I wrote a short song for Margo. I took my guitar along in hopes of singing it for her as she lay cold in the coffin. I was granted my request. The song echoed up into the lofty chasm of the cold stone sanctuary.

Like A Butterfly.
Words and Music by Joel B. Kirkpatrick.
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ONE DAY... WE'LL MEET AGAIN.
ONE DAY... AT THE RAINBOW'S END
WE'LL FLY...

LIKE THE BUTTERFLY.

ONE DAY... ALL THE CLOUDS WILL BE GONE.
ONE DAY... WE'LL LIVE ON AND ON
AND FLY...

LIKE THE BUTTERFLY.

SO FLY AWAY...
TO THE WORLDS UNKNOWN
I KNOW...
YOU'RE NOT... REALLY GONE.

JUST FLYING...

LIKE A BUTTERFLY...

LIKE A... BUTTERFLY.....

It is interesting to note that I had written that song the day of her service. What is also noteworthy is the fact that the minister had also written a sermon with the theme of butterflies. What is undeniably unearthly, is that her husband, my friend, had written a eulogy which carried the same theme of the butterfly. None of us knew what the others had written, until the words floated up into that lofty chasm.

It was a long drive from the city to the quiet country cemetery. No words were spoken. When we arrived, there were only four men and a man with a backhoe that dug the hole. The driver of the hearse and the local minister held the end of the casket, while my friend and I carried the front. We walked past broken slabs of concrete and weathered wooden markers to the back corner of the quiet little cemetery.

We placed her above the hole facing the setting sun. The minister said a few empty words, and she was lowered into the cold ground. Before we reached the car, I heard the backhoe crank up and begin its work.

There was a dullness that engulfed me on the trip back to the city. My friend spoke of how lovely the service was, and how interesting it was about the butterfly themes. I was numb. Only one teardrop fell at the cemetery, and it was mine. When we walked in Margo's house, there were a few people standing around talking and eating, as is customary after affairs like this. I could not take it, and quietly slipped out the back door and made my way to the chair in the middle of the back yard where Margo sat. I sat down in it, and closed my eyes.

I felt the wind brush across my face and I opened my eyes and looked up. Not a leaf quivered. I thought it must have been just a small wisp of wind that came and went, and did not disturb the trees. As I sat under the still leaves, another tear trickled down and fell on my shirt. I heard someone coming. It was my friend. He announced that it was a grand gathering, and asked if I wanted to come inside. I did not. I made my excuses and went home to an empty house. I fell across my bed and cried like a baby until I drifted off to sleep.

I woke to a chill, as a wisp of wind moved across my body. I sat upright in the middle of my bed and held my breath, as I waited for my eyes to adjust to the darkness. I was inside of my own house. No open windows, and no fans pushing stagnant air from room to room. I stood up and flipped the light switch on. I checked the front door. It was locked. And the back door was locked as well. I turned every light in the house on. I checked methodically each and every room. I was alone.

I finally drifted off to a peaceful sleep around midnight. I woke to a new day full of sunshine and busy people going about their lives. Life moved steadily onward. It had only been three days since we placed Margo in the ground, when my friend called. He wanted me to bring my girl friend over and go through Margo's clothes and pick out what she wanted. I felt the numbness coming back, but I agreed.

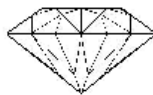
We arrived and found silver plates and cups and clothes, scattered through out the house in neat piles. It was an entire life's collection, stacked and organized. It was almost more than I could bear. My girl friend began going through the clothes, and I became ill with disgust. My good and long time friend, ask me to go out back to the Mercedes and get something for him. I don't remember what it was, but I remember gritting my teeth and marching out the back door. I was in full gate when I reached the old wooden garage. I marched in through the door.

I never saw it coming. It hit me in the chest, and went right through me. My head reeled back from the force, and each and every hair on the back of my neck stood erect. There was a musty smell in the air like something wet and decaying. I stood in the dank and dingy doorway half in light, and half in darkness. I could not move as my eyes strained to search each corner. She was there. I knew it. But my thoughts were not filled with warmth and happiness. They were cold and empty.

I didn't go back to Margo's house for several years after that. My girl friend moved on, and so did I. The last time I was there, I saw the granite slab with Margo's image on it. It was still leaning against the back of the house, covered in black and green mold from sitting in the shade and dampness.

I still visit that little country cemetery from time to time. I don't think my friend has been there very often, (if at all), since we placed Margo beneath the white sand. I always seem to find the little marker scattered about, and I place it back where it belongs. And each time I go... I feel a light wisp of wind... cross the back of my neck.

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